

From Éric Zemmour - La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot-Rubempré (2021) (auto-translated)

Farewell to the tropics  
October 30, 2009

The disappearance of Claude Lévi-Strauss could not go unnoticed. The major media all evoke the great intellectual, "the giant of thought", the "father" of structuralism, the ethnologist, Brazil, Tristes Tropiques. The "papers" have been ready for many years. Sometimes, the authors of these obituaries died even before the object of their "cold meat". We have no idea of dying at a hundred years old! I am thinking of the famous anecdote of old Fontenelle (still a centenarian!) confiding in one of her friends who was surprised not to die at her advanced age: "Hush! shut up ! The good Lord has forgotten us. »

However, we feel the media embarrassed at the corners. The praise is agreed and frozen. No one disputes his great intelligence and his immense intellectual influence; but the emotion is absent. He died too late. It happened to older people. If Louis XIV had left Versailles at the dawn of the 1680s, there would be no spot on the bright sun, nor the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, nor the military defeats of the War of the Spanish Succession; if Napoleon had been killed during the battle of Wagram in 1809, he left his Empire and his posterity at the height of its glory, before the Spanish guerrillas, the retreat from Russia or Waterloo.

If Lévi-Strauss had been "lucky" to disappear in the heart of these 1960s when his glory was at its peak, the tone would have been quite different. Our media would then have exalted, beyond structuralism and ethnology, the pope of anti-racism. His pamphlet Race and History, written after the war for Unesco, had become the essential breviary for any honest Western man who had to push back "the darkest hours of our history". His work was taught in schools and recommended reading as the ultimate scientific reference. By the grace of his implacable demonstration, racist had become synonymous with imbecile. He was scary before the war; he was laughing now.

And now Unesco offers him a new platform in 1971. But there is a misdeal. His hosts are only waiting for him to repeat what he said twenty years earlier. Lévi-Strauss does not hear it that way. His thinking has evolved under the influence of the latest discoveries in genetics. His text, under the title Race and Culture, caused a great scandal within the international organization. We reduce his speaking time so that he is forced to cut in the reading of his incongruous text.

In vain. After the conference, the speaker meets in the corridors many members offended by this questioning of the catechism that they have had so much trouble assimilating. Lévi-Strauss tells it with a biting humor in a collection of texts that he will publish in the 1980s, under the title *Le Regard distant*. But the quarrel goes far beyond the petty civil servant susceptibilities to the “deudeume” in Albert Cohen’s *Belle du Seigneur*. Over the years, racism had changed its meaning. No one thought of measuring skulls or calibrating eyes and hair anymore; but from now on, we treated as “racists” all those who defended their way of life and did not want to see different cultural codes imposed on their soil.

To the great despair of his enamored followers who expected him to give this “advance” his blessing as a world-renowned scholar, Claude Lévi-Strauss “revolted against this abuse of language<sup>1</sup>”. We understand the fear of the august delegates of Unesco when we read this passage from his conference:

He is in no way guilty of placing one way of life and thinking above all others, and of feeling little attraction towards such and such whose way of life, respectable in itself, departs from too much of that to which we are traditionally attached... If, as I wrote in *Race and History*, there exists between human societies a certain optimum of diversity beyond which they cannot go, but below which they cannot either descend without danger, we must recognize that this diversity results in large part from the desire of each culture to oppose those which surround it, to distinguish itself from them, in a word, to be itself; they are not unaware of each other, borrow from each other on occasion, but, in order not to perish, a certain impermeability must persist between them in other respects.

The anti-racist progressivism of the 1980s would not forgive the offense. Especially since Claude Lévi-Strauss persists and signs. During an interview with President Mitterrand, at the Élysée Palace, he described to him the dangers of too numerous and too heterogeneous immigration if it exceeded a certain “threshold of tolerance”. This expression pleases the president who takes it up, causing a media and political hustle and bustle, shocking the beautiful souls of the left and scandalizing the hierarchs of the Socialist Party. Mitterrand takes it for granted. Not Lévi-Strauss. Who dares to drive the point home in *Le Magazine littéraire*:

“I started to think about a time when our culture was attacking other cultures of which I became the defender and the witness. Now I feel like the tide has reversed and our culture is on the defensive against

external threats that probably include the Islamic explosion. As a result, I feel firmly and ethnologically defender of my culture. »

Lévi-Strauss had never hidden the harsh judgment he passed on Islam. I remembered that in *Tristes Tropiques* already, he felt that Islam, a virile and belligerent religion, unlike Christianity, feminine and peaceful, could not stand the "other", whether he was the foreigner, the infidel or the woman. Lévi-Strauss said that Islam "annihilates the other". The formula marked me because I did not imagine that the noun "nil" could give a verb. I thought while rereading this formula that he would today be dragged before the courts for "incitement to hatred and discrimination". He had a narrow escape. He knew it. In 2002, receiving Didier Eribon from the *Nouvel Observateur*, he told him:

I said in *Tristes Tropiques* what I thought of Islam. Although in a more chastened language, it was not so far from what we are on trial for today in Houellebecq. Such a trial would have been inconceivable half a century ago; it wouldn't have occurred to anyone. We have the right to criticize religion. We have the right to say what we think. [...] We are contaminated by Islamic intolerance.

Lévi-Strauss, attached to the understanding of the societies furthest from our modern societies, had taken advantage of this freedom of expression to express very early on his mistrust and concern about Islam and its "destroying appetite for all previous traditions". . The reticence with regard to Islam in these passages of *Tristes Tropiques*, published in 1955, is so strong that *Le Monde* was forced, in its obituary, to note that "certain pages [...], little noticed at the time , would surely earn their author virulent protests if they appeared today".

It was not the first time that Lévi-Strauss shocked progressives. Years earlier, during the Six Day War of June 1967, all French people of the Jewish faith, even the most assimilated like Raymond Aron, had, at the time of a danger that was believed to be deadly, awakened a fiber of Jewish patriotism; young people had demonstrated in the streets of Paris, with the blue and white flag of the State of Israel in their hands, which had aroused the ire of General de Gaulle and perhaps partly explained - in any case it was Raymond Aron's thesis - his famous formula on "the elite people, self-confident and dominating". Claude Lévi-Strauss, to the fury of his co-religionists, had the same reaction as General de Gaulle. The French assimilationist tradition had found there its most implacable and brilliant advocate. A tradition inscribed, it is true, in the flesh and genes of this Alsatian Jew, whose

grandfather, Isaac Strauss, was a conductor at the court of Louis-Philippe and then Napoleon III.

Assimilation is a mode of integration that demands cerebral control of its most archaic reflexes; a rational detachment that the supreme intelligence of Lévi-Strauss pushed very far when he declared that if Hitler had carried out his project of extermination of the Jews, the world would not have stopped turning and humanity would have lived, as she digested the disappearances of other peoples, in particular the American Indians. So many reflections and iconoclastic analyzes which would today be qualified as “provocations”, “slippages”, which would deserve “a report to the prosecution” and the discovery of the austere charms of the seventeenth chamber of the Paris court.

This legalization of the intellectual debate in France, which he observed at the end of his life, probably did not surprise our scholar who liked to quote this formula of a historian of English law of the 19th century, Henry Sumner Maine, on the Enlightenment of the 18th century: “The French philosophers showed themselves so impatient to escape what they considered to be the superstition of the priests that they threw themselves headlong into the superstition of the jurists. »

The immense prestige of Lévi-Strauss naturally protected him from his insults. But with his “camp”, this left which had extolled him for decades, the current was no longer flowing. Lévi-Strauss had committed an unpardonable sin in the eyes of our progressives. Lévi-Strauss considered that the demographic explosion was leading humanity to catastrophe; that a land of seven, eight, ten billion people was unlivable; that the human crowds were becoming too dense, the physical distances between different cultures too close to allow each of them to live harmoniously and freely. He had seen the Native American tribes wither under the pressure of white men, too numerous and too intrusive and too aggressive. He guessed that the European peoples were going to suffer this disastrous fate in the face of the invasion of the peoples of the South. He had traveled the same intellectual path as the famous author of *Le Camp des Saints*, Jean Raspail. He came from the Maurrassian right and Lévi-Strauss from the socialist left; but their common fondness for the peoples who were now said to be “first”, not to say “primitive”, had made them understand the mortal danger which awaited European civilization.